

for-services rates in an area. People love to talk about how Medicare Advantage plans are reimbursed too much, but unfortunately that rally cry is based off a study that did not compare apples to apples. If you compare the cost of delivering Part A and B services alone, Medicare Advantage plans are only paid 2.8 percent more than Medicare FFS. I am comfortable paying 2.8 percent more because seniors have more choices, they receive more comprehensive benefits, and their care is coordinated under Medicare Advantage plans. Medicare Advantage plans actually match treatments with diseases and maintenance care with chronic conditions.

Senator COBURN and I want to move Medicare Advantage from competition-lite to full competition. We will be introducing a bill in the coming weeks that will force Medicare Advantage plans to truly compete against each other on price. Medicare Advantage plans already compete on service and quality under our bill they will have to taken lessons from Part D drug plans and compete on price.

If you have been listening from the beginning, you hopefully understand how effective competition and choice have been in two parts of the Medicare program. And you understand why I want that same robust health care competition and choice for every American. Every American deserves access to quality, affordable health care of their choice and competition between health care plans will help achieve that goal.

REBUILDING AMERICA'S IMAGE

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, our go-it-alone foreign policy over the last 8 years has severely damaged our image and stirred up anti-American sentiment around the world. We have lost the international goodwill we had following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the failed strategy of the war in Iraq has cost us a good number of allies.

A worldwide survey conducted last year of 28,000 people, asking them to rate 12 countries, put the United States at the bottom, along with Iran and Israel, when it comes to having the world's most negative image. In fact, even North Korea ranked higher than the United States in that survey. Another survey found that our favorability rating around the world dropped considerably from 2000 to 2006. For example, in Germany, we went from a favorability rating of 78 percent in 2000 to 37 percent in 2006. In Spain, only 23 percent of people have a favorable opinion of the United States. I could go on and on, but I don't think anyone can dispute the fact that our image and credibility in the world has dropped dramatically. This negative trend hurts us. It makes it more difficult to implement our foreign policy, and even threatens our national security by making the United States a target.

With that being said, as the most powerful country in the world we still have an unprecedented opportunity to both help those in less fortunate countries and help our country regain the moral authority we once held.

A lot of interesting ideas have been proposed to repair our damaged image. Some of the most creative suggestions have come from students, such as the paper I recently received from Occidental College in Los Angeles. That paper makes recommendations for United States policy changes on issues like the war in Iraq, oil and energy issues, and illegal immigration, just to name a few. Calling for the United States to lead rather than dominate, to be a beacon more than a bullhorn, this paper presents a possible path to help repair our standing in the international community. I don't agree with everything in the paper, but it is full of interesting ideas that can make a difference. It is encouraging to see that the youth of this country have taken a serious interest in our country's image. I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to take a serious look at this and other proposals to see what Congress can do to help ensure that future generations inherit a government that is well respected throughout the world.

It is my hope that with the new administration, our country will be able to turn the page of the past 8 years and focus on a foreign policy that is more constructive. I look forward to working with my colleagues and the next President to make this happen.

AMERICA'S FOSTER CARE CHILDREN

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I rise today, during National Foster Care Month, to speak for the more than a half million children living in foster care across the United States who are waiting for a loving family to adopt them.

I encourage potential parents throughout our country to open their hearts, their lives and their homes to these vulnerable children and provide them with the safe, permanent families that all children deserve. As an adoptive parent myself, I know first-hand the joy and fulfillment adoption can bring to a family, and I cannot think of a more perfect gift to give a child than the love, nurturing, and protection they need to grow.

A sense of stability is critical to the development of children. Yet, young children in foster care never know how long they will stay in one place or where they will be sent off to next, resulting in a frightening lack of consistency and security.

I recently had the chance to meet with Aaron Weaver, a young man from Nebraska, who shared with me some of his experiences in the foster care system: "Growing up in foster care, a tattered yellow vinyl suitcase always accompanied me, as I switched families, rules and routines," he said.

I hated that suitcase. It was a constant reminder of how unstable my life was, and how every day was uncertain.

Fortunately, after 6 years in Nebraska's foster care system, Aaron was finally adopted. Adoption for him meant a family who gave him unconditional love. Adoption meant the end of packing his suitcase, wondering where he would be placed next. Adoption gave him, for the first time, the freedom and confidence to think about his future not in terms of where he would be sleeping next month, but in terms of what his goals were and where he wanted to go in life.

In 2005, just 10 percent of Nebraska's foster care children were lucky enough to be adopted into new families like Aaron's, leaving nearly a thousand more waiting eagerly for adoptive homes. Unfortunately, any chance of these children being placed with adoptive parents becomes worse the longer they remain in foster care. In fact, when a child reaches the 8- to 9-year age range, the probability that child will continue to wait in foster care exceeds the probability that he or she will be adopted; and the number of children in this older age group is growing.

The Adoption Incentive Program, a Federal program first enacted into law as part of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, is up for reauthorization this year. This important program encourages State governments to find permanent homes for foster children through adoption by rewarding those States which have increased their number of placements. Additionally, the program provides special incentives to focus on finding homes for older foster children and those with special needs. I am proud to report that, through this program, my home State of Nebraska was awarded \$1,392,000 between 2000 and 2006 for finding adoptive families for 2,483 children, money which will be re-invested to make this number even greater.

I believe we have a responsibility to help foster children in Nebraska and across the Nation join loving, permanent adoptive families such as Aaron's. I hope all of you agree and will join me in my commitment to improving America's foster care system.

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize May as National Foster Care Month. I salute the thousands of families in Kentucky and throughout the country who serve as foster parents, along with those who expand their families by adopting a child from the foster care system. Unfortunately, not every child finds a home. In 2005, more than 24,000 foster children reached their 18th birthdays without being adopted. As these young adults aged out of the foster care program, they faced many of life's challenges without the family support and encouragement that many of us take for granted. With over a half million children currently in our Nation's foster care system, it is imperative that we do all that we can to ensure that they

are able to join the families they so desperately need and deserve.

From my home State of Kentucky, Chris Brown is a testament to the importance of adoption. Chris entered foster care at the age of 11, after the death of his mother. He spent more than 2 years in foster care before being adopted. At the age of 13, Chris was adopted by his Big Brothers, Big Sisters mentor, Dave Brown. Chris thrived in his adoptive home, and was presented with opportunities he would not have had otherwise. Through the support of his adopted family, he was able to attend Northern Kentucky University, where he majored in psychology. Now married and with a family of his own, Chris has dedicated his career to social work, using his talents and skills to give back to the community. Chris's story demonstrates how an investment in just one child can pay off for an entire community.

The care provided by foster homes and foster families is of great value. Raising awareness about the number of foster children in America, and making it easier for families to adopt is crucial to guaranteeing that America's foster children have the resources and support they need to succeed. Chris Brown is an excellent example of how a child can thrive and develop in a loving family. National Foster Care Month reminds us of our obligation to America's youth. I commend all those who love and accept into their homes those children needing a home.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise in observance of National Foster Care Month. Throughout our Nation, so many families provide loving and caring homes for children who have suffered from abuse and neglect. This month is an important reminder to thank the families who welcome these children into their homes, as well as the State and local officials, social workers, health care workers, and others in our communities who look for signs of abuse and take action to ensure it stops.

Social workers, in particular, have numerous demands placed on them in their efforts to ensure appropriate care of abused and neglected children, those with disabilities and our vulnerable elderly. To help these workers in their important jobs, I recently introduced the Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young Jr. Social Reinvestment Act with Senator MIKULSKI. I look forward to swift passage of this bill so that we can better support our Nation's social workers.

I also want to thank those who help parents who may have a substance abuse problem or who suffer from mental illness. These important professionals help so many parents to overcome their illnesses, which can be a barrier in providing safe and stable homes for their children.

Our justice systems, including our judges, attorneys and local law enforcement, who work every day to ensure the safety of our children, also de-

serve our recognition this month. So many of them take the extra time in their overburdened caseloads to ensure they are doing the right thing for the future of each abused and neglected child. In fact, in my home State of Oregon, Judge Pamela Abernethy runs a program in her courtroom that engages mental health professionals, law enforcement officials, child development specialists and others in a team approach that has produced great outcomes for children and their parents. Her work helps to stop the cycle of abuse that we see too often in families. I look forward to continuing to work with Senator HARKIN to pass our bill, the Safe Babies Act, which will work to replicate successful programs like Judge Abernethy's across the Nation.

However, we know that often children may not be able to return to their birth families. In America we are lucky that many families, including my own, have a great love in their heart for children and are looking to adopt.

Oregonians Tim and Sari Gale, for example, originally were very interested in adopting an infant. However, as they continued to look into adoption, they could not get the images out of their minds of the older children they saw in the brochures. "We started to ask ourselves why we would adopt an infant, when so many children were in need of parents," said Shari. "It started making more and more sense for us to adopt an older child."

Soon, Andrew became a member of the family. "It has been heart-warming and amazing to watch the gradual process whereby this frightened little boy learned to love and to trust," observed a family friend. "Andrew has blossomed under the Gales' loving care." Watching Andrew interact with peers at high school events or serving as a counselor for other children at summer riding camp, one would never guess this likeable and polite young man had spent his early years as an abused and neglected child. The Gales truly are a testament to the healing power of a loving family.

The Federal Adoption Incentive Program, which was first enacted in 1997 as part of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, encourages States to find foster children permanent homes through adoption. The Adoption Incentive Program is due to expire on September 30. Congress must reauthorize this act so that it can continue to serve as a vitally important incentive to States for finalizing adoptions for children in foster care, with an emphasis on finding adoptive homes for special-needs children and foster children over age 9. I am proud of Oregon's success in finalizing more than 12,700 adoptions of children from foster care between 2000 and 2006. This has resulted in Oregon receiving \$3.1 million in Federal adoption incentive payments, which are invested back into the child welfare program.

In 2005, roughly 2,065 children from Oregon's foster care system were

adopted—but nearly 3,500 foster children in Oregon were still waiting for adoptive families, and they waited an average of about 2½ years to join a new family. These vulnerable children have waited long enough.

Again, it is important that we thank foster care and adoptive families in our Nation, as well as frontline workers who protect our children, for the wonderful work that they do and love that they share.

EXPORT CONTROL SYSTEM

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I wish today to discuss the U.S. export control system bureaucracy and its impact on our national interests.

Recently I chaired a hearing of the Oversight of Government Management Subcommittee of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee entitled "Beyond Control: Reforming Export Licensing Agencies for National Security and Economic Interests." Some of the issues explored in the hearing were: revising the multilateral coordination and enforcement aspects of export controls; addressing weaknesses in the interagency process for coordinating and approving licenses; reviewing alternative bureaucratic structures or processes to eliminate exploitable seams in our export control system; and ensuring that there are enough qualified licensing officers to review efficiently license applications.

Witnesses from the State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security, and the Department of Defense's Defense Technology Security Administration responded to almost a decade's worth of analysis, recommendations, reports, and testimony from the Government Accountability Office, GAO. The GAO witness on the panel identified numerous instances of inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the U.S. export control system, including poor strategic management, insufficient interagency coordination, shortages of manpower, short-term fixes for long-term problems, and inadequate information systems.

Although the agency witnesses acknowledged their progress in addressing these shortcomings, they also articulated a deeper need for greater reform in response to the challenges of globalization in the 21st century. I would go one step further than the administration witnesses. The U.S. export control system is a relic of the Cold War and does not effectively meet our national and economic security needs.

Recent examples demonstrate the challenges of controlling sensitive exports. Dual-use technology has been diverted through Britain and the United Arab Emirates, UAE, to Iran. A recent attempt by two men to smuggle sensitive thermal imaging equipment to China shows that Iran is not alone in